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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a two-year full partnership between special education teacher educators from five regional institutions of higher education and six school districts. The purposes of the partnership are identified and include working collaboratively to address and improve services to learners with special needs and to respond to the problems of teachers working with learners with special needs. The four partnership needs that were identified after the first year of the partnership are also discussed and include: (1) to provide effective support for beginning teachers; (2) to provide effective support for teachers on emergency certification; (3) to coordinate professional development opportunities in light of scarce resources; and (4) to develop a continuing regional network among consortium members to address mutual concerns and problems. The final section of the paper reviews the outcomes of the partnership. Highlighted are: the fully operational working regional consortium of university and local school district special educators, the development and distribution of a survey to first-year special education teachers about their experiences during the internship, the clarification of priority issues through a survey of special education coordinators, and the collection, and publication of a joint list of professional development opportunities for special education teachers. (CK)

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PULSE: A Collaborative Partnership between University and Local Special Educators

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The purpose of this article is to share the lessons learned through a two years full partnership between special education teacher educators from five regional institutions of higher education and six school districts. The colleges/universities and school districts involved in the partnership represent significant diversity. The institutions of higher education are as follows:

Bellarmine College	Private, Liberal Arts
Indiana University Southeast	State University
Jefferson Community College	Urban Community College
Spalding University	Private, Liberal Arts
University of Louisville	State University (Holmes Group)

The school district are as follows:

Archdiocese of Louisville	Large, Urban, Parochial (25,000+)
Bullitt County	Rural, Public
Hardin County	Rural, Public
Jefferson County	Large, Urban, Public (90,000+)
Oldham County	Rural, Public
Ohio Valley Education Consortium	Rural and Urban Counties
Shelby County	Rural, Public

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A significant percentage of the teachers inservice in the partnership school districts have completed the requirements for initial and/or continuing teacher certification at one or more of the five institutions of higher education in the partnership.

IDENTIFIED PURPOSES OF THE PARTNERSHIP

This interesting and diverse partnership began in late fall 1995. Each member was drawn to the partnership because of mutually agreed upon concerns, issues, and problems associated with special education teacher education and service delivery. During the first months of the partnership, two purposes were identified as follows:

> To work collaboratively to address and improve services to learners with special needs
>
> To work collaboratively to address the problems of teachers working with learners with special needs

As the partnership has grown and solidified, these two purposes have continued to drive the partnership's work.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND WORKPLAN FOR PARTNERSHIP

By the end of the first year of the partnership, four identified needs had emerged. The partnership members committed themselves to addressing the following needs:

1. To provide effective support for beginning teachers

For a variety of reasons, first year teachers in each of the partnership public school districts are usually assigned to behaviorally disordered and/or emotionally disturbed units. Such assignments are often overwhelming to new teachers. The partnership sought to discover (a) what factors seemed to increase the probability that first year teachers would be

successful in such units and (b) what components or support activities could/should the partnership provide to increase both the probability that the new teacher would have a successful first year experience and also be retained within the profession.

2. To provide effective support for teachers on emergency certificates

Like many school districts in the nation, the partnership districts have consistently, over several years, experienced shortages of qualified special education teachers. Likewise, like many states, the State Board of Education (Kentucky), superceded by the Professional Standards Board has adopted regulations that provide for "emergency" credentialing in special education for teachers already holding "regular" teaching credentials. These individuals are frequently referred to as "nine-hour-wonders" since they can granted an emergency certificate for Teachers of Special Education after nine hours of special education coursework. If a school district is unable to employ one or more fully qualified special education teacher to staff units for learners with special needs , that district may employ such individuals to staff the units.

Again, as with the fully prepared first year special education teachers, teachers with emergency special education credentials are frequently assigned to some of the most difficulty units. This is a overwhelming assignment for a teacher with little or no teaching experience and/or little or no experience with learners with special needs.

In both cases, the partnership sought to identify and implement strategies that would more effectively support both first-year special education teachers and teachers holding emergency certificates.

3. To coordinate professional development opportunities in light of scarce resources

A third concern that brought the partnership together was a focus on collaborative planning. In light of scarce resources and to avoid un-necessary duplication of efforts by school districts and institutions of higher education, how might the partnership work and plan together to meet the initial and continuing education needs of special education professionals?

4. To develop a continuing regional network among consortium members to address mutual concerns and problems

As the partnership expanded and began to work collaboratively, each member became more and more convinced that their joint efforts to solve problems and address critical issues far outweighed any individual school district's or institution of higher education efforts. To this end, the partnership has met at least quarterly since fall 1995. In some instances, work groups were assigned specific tasks and met more frequently.

PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES, 1995-1997

To date, the partnership has completed four tasks or activities. First, and foremost, a fully operational working regional consortium of university and local school district special educators is alive and well and living in central Kentuckiana (Kentucky and Indiana).

The partnership has also generated and distributed a survey to first-year special education teachers about their experiences during the internship year. This information provided much needed and specific information regarding what support first year teachers needed to increase the probability that they would have a successful internship year.

The partnership was able to clarify priority issues through a survey of special education coordinators (statewide). The number of surveys that were returned was significant, thus, permitting members of the partnership to draw some

conclusions and inferences from the data collected. These conclusions and inferences guided the professional development planning.

For the past two years the partnership collected and published a joint list of professional development opportunities for special education teachers. In the process of collecting and publishing this information, members of the partnership were able to: (a) identify unmet professional development needs, (b) begin to eliminated duplication of professional development courses or experiences, and (c) advance the partnership's ability to generate professional development opportunities collaboratively.

These four activities remain the focus of the partnership for the 1997-98 school year.

Finally, common goals and needs drew this interesting and productive partnership together. As the members continue to work and plan together, hopefully learners with special needs and the professionals who serve them, will be the beneficiaries of this good work.